Editor's Note: Ed Stafford is a member of St. John's, Logan, and a marketing professor at Utah State University who is on sabbatical leave advising the Utah Energy Office on a campaign to promote wind power development in the state.

Selling the Wind

Perhaps you've seen them around town or on the freeway—curious bumper stickers proclaiming "Wind Power Saves Water." You've probably mumbled, "What does that mean?" This is one of the messages of a broader education campaign sponsored by the Utah Energy Office that my marketing colleague, Professor Cathy Hartman, and I are helping to design and promote across the state regarding the economic, environmental, and quality of life opportunities associated with harnessing Utah's abundant wind resources for electricity.

Assisting with this campaign has been how I've been spending my sabbatical leave this semester from Utah State University where I teach marketing. My students know I'm a little unorthodox—a marketing professor who preaches the business opportunities of conservation, cleaner technology, and wind power. Here are some insights into the campaign, how wind power could benefit Utah, and why I'm spiritually committed to turning Utah on to the energy of the wind.

How Wind Power Saves Water

Electricity is so familiar and basic to our daily existence that we take it for granted, rarely thinking about where it comes from. It just seems to come out of the walls. In Utah, about 94% of our electricity comes from coal-fired power plants. While coal is inexpensive and abundant in Utah, burning it for electricity contributes to the state's air pollution and consumes significant quantities of water to produce steam and cool boilers. A recent Hewlett Foundation report found that Utah power plants consume about 800 gallons of water for every megawatt hour of electricity produced (a megawatt hour is the amount of electricity a typical Utah home uses every month). While agriculture and urban use still account for the vast majority of the state's water consumption, power plants can monopolize water in local areas, limiting its availability for other economic and recreational opportunities—an issue of increasing importance as the state contemplates strategies for navigating through a fifth year of drought.

—COURTESY OF ED STAFFORD

Bumper stickers and a billboard like this are showing up in Utah. Tax revenue from proposed wind power generators could help fund Utah schools. The little girl on the right is Victoria Stafford, member of St. John's-Logan and daughter of Ed and Betty Stafford.

Wind turbines consume virtually no water, and our car decals encourage Utahns to support wind farm development throughout the state to not only clean our air, but save water, too! Utah's population is expected to grow 70 percent over the next three decades. To accommodate that growth with sufficient energy and water, wind power must be part of Utah's future.

Wind's Other Opportunities

Wind power development could provide Utah other opportunities as well. Wind power is increasingly cost-competitive with traditional fossil fuels. It is inexhaustible and has no fuel costs. Because wind power costs are based primarily on the upfront expenses of installing wind turbines and equipment, prices are stable and predictable and could moderate overall energy prices in the face of soaring natural gas prices. Moreover, as evidenced in Texas, Wyoming, and other western states, wind power is a lucrative "year-round harvest" for rural communities, hardest hit by drought. It provides wind royalties to landowners, jobs, and economic opportunities for local businesses in the construction and operation of wind farms. This, in turn, can bolster local tax revenues to support schools and local services. Thus, two of our forthcoming campaign messages include "Wind Power Can Fund Schools" and "Wind Power—Cash Crop."

Wind Power Demand in Utah

The Episcopal Diocese of Utah already purchases wind power via Utah Power's "Blue Sky" program, following a resolution from last year's convention. The Diocese pays a small premium to purchase "blocks" of wind generated electricity that are added to the electricity grid serving Utah and the West. Presently, over 6,000 households and over 100 businesses across the state have also elected to participate in the "Blue Sky" program, and Utah's demand for wind power is growing. Unfortunately, because Utah has no wind farms and no current plans to build any, the wind power to meet

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Utah's growing demand is produced and purchased from other states (primarily Wyoming).

What prevents Utah from harvesting its own wind resources? Out-moded perceptions, fear of higher prices, "not-in-my-backyard" attitudes, beliefs that environmental concerns are extremist, a lack of government support. Ironically, in 1999 in Texas, then-Governor George Bush signed legislation to kick-start wind power development. Texas had virtually no commercial wind power capacity when the legislation was signed, but it has been so successful in developing its wind resources, some experts predict Texas will soon surpass California as the nation's largest wind power producer. In Wyoming, a sales tax incentive was passed last year that is attracting wind power development dollars, and the Utah legislature should consider a similar measure to be competitive. Our campaign, hopefully, will change Utahns' attitudes and encourage Utah to follow other states.

Why Market the Wind?

Many have asked me why I'm so committed to wind power. I'm not sure I've offered a good response. As a father, I worry about what kind of world my generation will leave my daughters. As a Christian, I am called to protect God's Creation and work toward preserving the earth's natural ability to generate and replenish the resources—God's Bounty—it offers life. Marketers solve customers' problems by providing the "right products" that fulfill customer needs; thus, as a marketing academic serving our broader culture, I believe I should promote the "right solutions" for society's problems. Our national reliance on fossil fuels pollutes our world and increasingly threatens our national security. Wind power is a clean "product" that helps us achieve greater energy independence and could set the stage for the widely-touted promise of hydrogen for fuel cells (wind power could replace fossil fuels to make hydrogen, thus creating completely pollution-free fuel for tomorrow's cars).

I've always wanted to do more than simply teach students how to sell more. Perhaps we only hear about the "dark side" of marketing—how rampant consumerism is degrading the planet and causing "affluenza," our society's treadmill existence of over-consumption, overextended credit, and overwork to pay for it all. Studies show that we're the most affluent society in the world's history, but we're stressed-out and unhappy. Is marketing really the root of our culture's ills? When a biologist I met at a Greening of Industry Conference some years ago questioned why I was there, claiming that I was "the enemy," I vowed to set at least one example of how marketing could be employed for social good. Since then, my research and work has centered on the diffusion of cleaner technologies and business practices and how disparate groups in society can work together to make it happen.

The wind power campaign has brought together a diverse set of Utahns—government agents, utility representatives, farmers and ranchers, wind entrepreneurs, academics, business people, activists, and citizens—all of whom share a common vision for their state's future. Wind power may not solve all of Utah's drought, education, or rural economic woes nor will it meet all of Utah's future energy needs. It can help address these issues positively, however, and more importantly, move the state down a cleaner path for our children and future. ▼

—Edwin R. Stafford, St. John's, Logan